DENES KOROMZAY, MEMOIRS
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I am Denes Koromzay. I am a retired professor of chamber music and viola at the College of Music at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I would like to record some recollections of my very long life, which might be of interest to some people, if there are any, who want to listen to this.

I was born in 1913, which was one year before the outbreak of the Great War, in Budapest, capitol of Hungary. My father was a railroad engineer who had a very comfortable position at the Ministry of Transportation in Budapest, when he got an offer at Priart Railroad Company whose headquarters were in Arad, which is a provincial town of middle size in the East of Hungary, very close to Transylvania but not part of Transylvania. So the family moved to Arad, where he assumed his position. And so it was in that town that I grew up. Obviously I don't remember my birth; don't remember too much of the first 4 or 5 years of my life - the war years. My father, as railroads were declared of strategic importance, he didn't have to assume military duties, so he didn't have to go to this incredible massacre which went on for 4 years - millions of people died in the trenches. So he stayed home.

As far as I remember, I had a perfectly normal young life as a kid. We had German nannies. I had three sisters - middle one was 8 years older. When I was 5 years old, she undertook to teach me to write and to read, which she did. My parents took me to the elementary school and I successfully passed the exam. So I was admitted to the 2nd class of the elementary school because I could write and read. It was a German school; because the links between Austria and Hungary were centuries long - and every educated person spoke - we didn't learn German; we knew German. And so I went to a German-language elementary school. And finished it.

Also in the middle-class citizenry, it was very usual to give their kids music lessons and also inscribe them to dance schools and all that, and also to French private lessons, which I all had to do. There was a woman who was teaching beginner's piano; she came and she had a pencil in her hand; whenever I hit a wrong note she ticked on my fingers, so I hated it. And I didn't practice it, and was not interested in it at all. There was in Arad, a highly trained and very good German musician, Mr. Unger, or Herr Unger, who was a very respected citizen and who taught piano to the children of the middle-class citizens. So by some inspiration, my parents changed my lady who ticked my fingers to him. This is absolutely subjective and correct memory that I remember that, in a few months time, I made such an incredible progress in piano and I just loved it and practiced, and I was amazed what I can do. So this is

how my love for music started. Herr Unger was basically a violinist, a very good one. He would have loved to teach violin, but there was very little demand for parents of kids to learn violin, so he taught piano. At one of our lessons, he discovered that I had absolute pitch; and then he persuaded my parents to switch me from piano to violin. So they bought me a 3/4 violin and that decided my fate. I think I had some kind of natural ability to play the piano. And if I would have persisted to play the piano, then probably I would have turned out to be a pretty good one. so I switched to violin. So I became a violinist, and later a violist. I don't know how I would have done in piano, probably well, but I didn't do too badly, after all, with the violin, or the viola either.

The war ended when I was 5 or 6 years old. The famous treaty of Versailles decided to punish the losers which were Germany, Austria and Hungary. And one part of the Versailles Treaty was called the Treaty of Trianon, which dealt with Hungary. Though Germany and Austria were punished ,too, with tremendous losses and all that. No other country was punished like Hungary. Hungary was a pretty large country. The Treaty of Trianon deprived it of 2/3's of its possessions. The East, including Translvania, which had 600 years of Hungarian history, went to Romania. The North, the Slovaks, they were incorporated in the newly-formed Czechslovakia Republic. Hungary lost its part of this. And the south went - Croatia and all that - went to the newly-formed Yugoslav Republic. So Hungary, instead of being, in European terms at least, rather a large country, became a very small country - which is still today. Millions of Hungarians lived and still live under foreign rule.

The Railroad Company of my father's, by the treaty, was cut. 1/3 of the tracks were left in the remaining part of Hungary, and 2/3's went to Romania. so Romania immediately proceeded to expropriate and nationalize the railroad. The only thing I remember was my father had to go every week-end to Bucharest to deal with the transfer and try to save his employees.

So otherwise, I lived my childhood in Arad. As my father's position was a very respected one, and the town, in spite of being Romania-ruled, remained almost 90 % Hungarian city. That was doing pretty well, so I don't remember any deprivations in my childhood. I pursued my violin lessons; and after elementary school I went to High School. The educational system in Hungary at that time was that you had 4 years of elementary schools and 8 years of, what they called, Gymnasium, which is actually high school - and if you finish that then you had a very tough examination which was called Majura - if you passed that, then you were free to go to a university. So I was enrolled in high school, I was playing violin in which I seemingly made some progress. And then Herr Unger died. At first they tried to replace him; and they found somebody who was an amateur violinist, a pretty good one for an amateur. And he resumed teaching me violin, but somehow it wasn't satisfactory, so they decided to send me to the Academie of Franz Liszt in Budapest which was a very well-recognized music school.

So at the ripe age of 13, I departed and my new life started in Budapest. I lived with my aunt, a sister of my mother, who had a son who was my age. And I didn't go to high school like my cousin did, because the Academie consumed all my time. Besides having violin lessons, we had to have piano lessons, we had to have harmony, we had to have music history, we had orchestra, we had chamber music - and so, my days were fully occupied. They hired me an instructor who came 3 times a week in the evening when I came home finally from the Academie and instructed me in the high school curriculum. At the end of each year I went to a private examination, and by some miracle I passed them all with rather good grades.

My life was in the Academie. The Academie was a strange structure, because, as the name indicates, it was, had University rank. But the Academie Franz Liszt accepted - they didn't have age limits; so whoever played the cymbal, or the trombone, or the violin, or the piano, or played their instruments exceptionally well was accepted without asking your age. There were preliminary classes, and then there were 4 years which were called Academie classes, which somehow corresponds with 8 years of College here; and then you either went further into different ways. The head of the school was Jeno Hubay who was born somewhere in the middle of the last century and probably was a very brilliant violinist; and he was a pupil of Josef Joachim who was a Hungarian violinist who was a towering figure in the early 19th century in the musical life and had his famous Joachim Quartet; he was composer; he was recognized as one of the great musical figures. And Hubay was his pupil. And then Hubay also studied with Henri Vieuxtemps who was the head, at that time, of the highly recognized Brussels Belgium School of Music; and when he died or retired, Hubay got his place. So he was directing this school when he got an invitation from Budapest to head the Franz Liszt Academie which was an offer he couldn't refuse; so he settled in Budapest, started teaching, building up his career. He was lucky in the beginning having students like Franz von Vichai, who was preceding Mischa Elman, was one of the greatest child prodigies in violin playing, Joseph Szigeti who obviously everyone knows, one of the great violinists of that epoch; and Emil Talman; scores of others. So the fame of the Hubay school spread across the world. In the meantime, he took absolute control over the Academie; he was the head. He had about 9 violin teachers; all of them were his former pupils. For 4 years we didn't hear anything else but, "if you ever get in the presence of this great, great man then listen to everything which he says, because it is the Bible," so we were well-prepared to admire Hubay.

My new life included to making enormous amount of new friends. I was 13 years old when I got there - 17 when I finished the academic classes. Practically everybody was pianists, violinists or whatever - were running around - all became my friends. The number of talents who were there is absolutely amazing because my graduating class of 1929 or 30, included at least 15 who made world-reputation. My primary one was Annie Fischer, the pianist, who was a year younger than I was, was a very close

friend, and who later became one of the leading woman pianists, if not the leading woman pianist of the later part of our century. We were very close friends as children or teenagers and remained until her untimely death a few years ago. My best friend was Sandor Vegh who had the same violin teacher as I had; we followed the same classes, and in a sense were competitors, but also very good friends. We chased the same girls, one who was Vera Ratkai, who was a long-legged beauty, temptress; every boy in the school ran after her. I somehow acquired her as my sonata partner in the chamber music classes of Leo Weiner. I was deeply in love with her for 4 years. she was a very flirtatious girl; she was pursued by so many other boys; that made me angry. Sometimes we fought. My greatest success in those 4 years was I once accompanied her home and in the park I kissed her on the cheek; which I promptly reported to Sandor the next day. And he was very jealous. This was very banal, teen-aged story which there are thousands of. But I tell it, because the conclusion of it was rather amusing.

45 years later, with my 2nd string quartet, the New Hungarian String Quartet, we had a tour in South America. One of our stops was Lima, the capitol of Peru. We had our concerts there, and by the grape-vine, I don't know how; I knew that she, Vera Ratkai, lived there. She married a Hungarian diplomat who was sent to Peru, and when the Communists took over Hungary, and then he resigned. Seemingly he died early, and all my colleagues on the following free day went to see Matupechu, which is one of the great tourist attractions of the world - the old Indian empire - I decided, because I knew she was living there, to devote this free day to hunt her up. I finally succeeded with the help of people who knew her. I found her in the hospital where she was under-going cancer treatment. She was a widow. After this reunion of after almost 45-50 years, she was talking incessantly that she was so deeply in love with me for 4 years and how cruel and how insensitive I was, and how she suffered from it. So much for lost opportunities.

One of my other colleagues in that circle of Annie Fischer and Sandor Vegh, was Georg Sandor who was a brilliant pianist who made a very good career, especially in South America, and Andor Fuldess, who died also earlier, and Edy Kilany who was as Hungarian as I; but his parents immigrated to America and so he was born in America, and so by right he was American citizen. He was my age, and he came back to Budapest because he was the star pupil of Ernst Dohnanyi, who was the head of the piano faculty. so Kilany was there; and I had another colleague - Friscai - was my colleague in composition classes because I took a second major in composition for 3 years; so he was a good friend. Not that I really wanted to compose, but I wanted to understand more about structure of music and all that, so I followed those classes, which added to my load. But, Friscai became a conductor and got to Berlin and was the head of the Berlin Radio Orchestra and was the darling of the Deutsche Grammaphone who played him out against Karajan and Furtwangler who were also in Berlin at the time. He had a brilliant career; he later became head conductor at either Dallas or Houston Symphony, I don't

remember which, I think it was Houston. He also died early. I had another good friend - his name - Oh before I get to this - When I was there, there was a story circulating - filtering down from the previous generations, which I believe must be true - which was 10 years before I got there, Hubay was having a student, whose name was Eugene Blau. He was very talented and Hubay was satisfied with him; but at that time he was old and a pompous ass. But anyway, at one of his lessons, he said to this student, "Look, Blau, you are very talented; and you will make it; but look, Blau is not a name for a Hungarian artist; Blau is so typically Jewish name. So , you are Hungarian, why don't you look around and think about this and choose a more Hungarian-sounding name. Blau won't help you. " For American audiences might be strange; because there was practically no anti-Semitism; on the contrary, practically the musical world was ruled by Jews in America. But Europe, and especially Eastern, middle Europe, the anti-Semitic sentiment was strong, even before Hitler came to power. So he told this to Blau, then forgot about it. A few weeks later, in one of the lessons, he said, "Now, Blau, did you think about what I told you last time." He said, "Yes, ___Music Director," '"Oh, very good, And did you find a name which I recommended you?" Yes, I found a very good name." "And what is it?" And this was chutzpah Jewish youngster, he said," Hubay." And he was Eugene. Well, that was such a colossal impertinence to name himself after his master that he was thrown out of school immediately and then he somehow went to America and started a conducting career which turned out to be very successful. But he remembered his old master's advice, and took up the name, Hungarian-sounding name, after all, he was Hungarian, which was Ormandy. Became one of the most celebrated conductors in the world - head of the Philadelphia Orchestra, successor of Stokowski. So that was the story I wanted to tell.

So, one of my friends was a pianist by the name by George Stern. He was a pianist, a very good one. In the shadow of Annie Fischer, but there were so many good pianists and he was a good one. But his interests were soon more for composition - went to composition classes and for conducting. So he went to conducting classes and he graduated as a conductor with 7 others. I was the concertmaster of the student orchestra who accompanied, or played under them; so he got his conductor's diploma. That's fine, except what do you do with a conductor's diploma if you have nobody to conduct. So he took a position; they offered him a position; he was very talented. in the Budapest Opera as a co-repetitor; whose task was, at that time, maybe it changed since, but the singers were not musicians, they did not know pitch, didn't know rhythm, they didn't know anything, but they were good voices. So they had to be trained in basic music. And the co-repitiros had their work by coaching the singers. That is what he did for 2 years. And, as a reward, he got I think 2 or 3 Sunday afternoon conducting possibilities at the Opera to conduct Die Fledermaus or some light opera. But at that time, anti-Semitism was growing; George Stern was not a very Hungarian name and it was a typically Jewish name, so there was a very wealthy member of one of the great industrial families in Hungary, who was a great sponsor of the Opera and

formed a group of people who were friends of the Hungarian Opera who liked Stern very much, and said, "Look, the way it looks here now, Hitler was already in power in Germany, and you don't have a future in this country. Go out (he was a magnificent host and every musical celebrity who came to Hungary was treated to fabulous suppers and dinners. All the artists knew him. He said, "Look, my friend, Arturo is right now conducting the Salzburg Festival. I give you a letter of recommendation. Go out of this country with your name and your jewishness; you don't have too much future here.:

That's the last I saw of him. Then the war broke out and all the miseries; after the war, I heard his story myself. He went to Salzburg and did something there, I don't know. He spent the war years in Switzerland; he married a Swiss woman and subsisted by accompanying visiting soloists at the piano. In the meantime, Kilenyi, whom I talked about, pupil of Dohnanyi, who was an American citizen obviously went home to America. When the war was practically won, the Allied forces, he was a Lieutenant in the liberating American army. And they marched through _ Germany and they came to Munich. He was called a cultural officer and his task was to reconstruct, reopen, Munich opera-house. which was one of the 5 great opera houses in Germany and was very famous. So he found theatre which was usable and somehow collected singers and staff. But he was in need of conductors. And he remembered our common friend. And with help of Army intelligence, he found him in Switzerland and he called him and said, "Why don't you come and conduct an opera here? There are possibilities. " And, again, an offer which he couldn't refuse. He obviously came. And he conducted. Next day, he was offered a general Music Directorship of the Munich Opera - it was such an enormous success. The only difference is that he changed his name from Stern to Solti. Everybody knows Solti; close friend of mine; died a few months ago, and he was the great conductor of the Chicago Symphony, successor of Fritz Reiner who was also Hungarian.

So, we finished academic classes and the road went two ways. Hubay was throning above the whole establishment as a King. Didn't teach violin actually, he taught but only so-called artist series; artist classes - you would call it master classes. He never accepted more than 6 or 7 or 8 students out of the 20 or 30 who finished the academic. Many of them were very talented, but if they were not accepted by Hubay's master class then they had to choose pedagogy or go into teaching or whatever. Both Sandor Vegh and myself were accepted by Hubay, so we studied with him in his famous master class. He was such an outstanding personality in Hungary; he married a Countess who inherited a tremendous fortune and had a palace in Budapest on the Danube. Every Sunday afternoon, he held private concerts which were broadcast by the Hungarian Radio. He played himself, and whoever came to Budapest visiting artist was invited to play. And he also, quite often, invited his more advanced students of the Academy to play chamber music there. So I played several times in the so-called Hubay afternoons.

But, after finishing, his classes were such that every celebrity that visited Budapest was invited to this great event when the great master was teaching; he never had more than 8 or 10 students; there were always some 30 people sitting there; and the great master was poking his finger in front of his students, and "Now, you play." Whoever was the victim, so we played. Then he made some remarks of great generality, that, "Koromzay, a little warmer." Out of which I didn't learn much. But we learned from each other, because we were talented. By the way, the Hubay School was not without rivals. There was another Hungarian violinist by the name of Leopold Auer, who was probably older than Hubay, who in the middle of the 19th century who, for some reason, went to Russia and founded, settled in Petersburg, and founded the Auer School. And Drawing on the immense and unbelievable potential of musical talents in the Ukranian and Polish ghettos, he produced violinists and, just to name a few names which you might be familiar with, Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifitz, Effram Zimbalist, and Nathan Milstein - they all came from the Auer School. so that was a competition to Hubay. But there was a third school which was also very famous - in Prague in Czechoslovakia. There was Sevcik. I am very sorry to say that he was not Hungary, but Czech. He was seemingly a very good teacher, but his most famous student was Jan Kubelick, who was known as the greatest violin virtuoso in the world in his time. I heard him only in his decline when he was old; even then he was very impressive.

So when we finished, we graduated, we got our artists diploma - whatever it was worth - because you have a diploma it doesn't mean you are an artist or that you have audiences to play for, But we got it. In 1931, there was a violin competition held in Vienna. In those times, those competitions; there were no competitions on every street corner as there are now. This was a big, big event. Young aspiring violinists from all over the world wanted to be accepted and participate. Hubay just graduated 6 or 7 of us from his class; he said," You should go, you people. Because you have to hold up the name of the Hubay school. You will do well, and all that." So we all went; borrowed money; lived in cheap hotels; went through the procedures. But it was a very strong competition. The jury included practically everybody who was a great name in string playing - the system was there were hundreds and hundreds of applicants and they had to be weeded out. So each member of the jury individually surveyed about a dozen applicants a day, and gave them either a white card which meant they could proceed to the next stage, or a red card which meant they were eliminated. Sandor Vegh and myself succeeded, and all my other colleagues except one - whose name was Karoli Szenasi who was of Gypsy origin. He was really not a musician; he never went to a chamber music class in his life; he never studied composition; he never studied even harmony. But he was, I would say, a circus artist in virtuosity of left hand. He had a pretty agreeable, not nice tone, but what he could do in virtuosity was absolutely amazing. He only played Paganini and most difficult pieces. They were not difficult enough for him, so when Paganini wrote a simple run, then he played it in thirds. He was absolutely amazing. And he was in our class. And besides he was a very good friend; we went to school together for 6 years. He had the misfortune of

getting examined in the previews by Georg Enesco, who was a great Rumanian violinist, who lived in Paris. He was a great musician and all that, but he certainly wasn't a virtuoso type. He wanted him to play some Bach which was not satisfactory, so he was the only one of our group who got a red card, so he was eliminated. So we were obviously very sorry for him. He was a very good ping-pong player; I played lots of ping-pong with him. so, he was hanging around in Vienna, not going home immediately. The Concert house in Vienna, the largest concert hall in the city and which was the site of the competition, was a violin shop, one of the most famous violin shops in Austria. So he went in and asked the owner whether he could try out some Italian violins; he said he was a competitor in the great advertised competition. So they said, "sure," go to the back room and gave him a few Italian violins which he played. As it happened, a few minutes later, in comes in the same shop Jan Kubelick, who was a member of the jury. He had some re-hairing job to do; he talked to the owners, "I hear some violin playing in the back, who is this?" They said, "it's a young man who is a competitor in the..:" He said, "let me go in" He went in and made him play for an hour. And then he went back, he was a member of the jury, and made such an unbelievable scandal, that this was the greatest talent he ever heard in his life, and that he was eliminated in the preliminaries - that is intolerable. He made such a fuss, that he was reinstated. The next day - that was on the full house - the whole jury sitting around. The routine was that you had your repertoire which was given to the jury and they selected what you are going to play; but it was not stated, but practically the iron rule was that you had to play unaccompanied Bach to begin with. When Szenasi's turn came, he came out, and without waiting for the jury to ask him what to play, he started to play also unaccompanied variations on Austrian theme by Ernst, which was probably the most difficult violin piece ever written. Before the jury could stop him, everybody fell back. Then he finished, and there was such a tremendous ovation - 2,000 people in the audience - that he was promoted to the finals. And, there was another school which I failed to mention before, but it was not in the time of Hubay and Auer, but Carl Flesch, but who was, I am sorry to say, was of Hungarian origin also. He traveled all his life with a Hungarian passport tho he didn't speak Hungarian. He was a great teacher and taught at the Hochschuler in Berlin. He sent a strong team to this competition. The star member of this team was Ricardo Odnoposoff. He was 20 years old, or something, but he came there as if he was owning the place, and said, well, this is my compeition, I will win it anyway. He went around with self-assurance I never saw in a youngster of 20. There were also other good violinists - Roman Totenburg, Gimpel - There was a 15-year old girl, a French girl, who was very talented whose name was Jeanette Neveu. Jeanette Neveu became one of the most celebrated woman violinists in the world. Then she was 15 years old, and she played very well; and she was also in the finals - the final 10 . The competition went on. Vegh, myself, and my other colleagues did not get into the finals; but we got honorary diplomas or whatever it was worth. The finals went on. Our colleague, Szenasi, won. Odnoposoff came in 2nd, and Jeanette Neveu came in 5th. Obviously there was a big shift, a big difference in the jury, because Szenasi, after all was not a musician. He could not play

anything slow, only virtuoso pieces. But finally, after great debate, in the jury, they decided that if he could play something Baroque music, slow music, or something, they would agree that he gets the first prize. He didn't have anything in his repertoire, so we all coached him for days to play a slow movement of Locatelli sonata which he finally mastered and played, and seemingly satisfied the jury so he got first prize. Not that he made so much of it, because he obviously got some orchestra engagements and played concertos, but there was no conductor who could accompany him and he had no sense of music. Whatever happened to him, I don't know. He certainly didn't make a world career.

But I was so much impressed by the quality of playing of the Flesch students, tho I had my artist diploma and I was in Budapest playing with orchestras, but I decided that I would like to study with Flesch. So I applied and was accepted, so I spent a year in Berlin. Unfortunately, at that time, Hitler was already in power; and Flesch's great resources that Auer previously had of the Jewish population of Eastern Europe was drying out; but he was really great teacher. He knew everything about the physiology of violin playing, the role of muscles which one muscle plays which muscle doesn't; he knew everything; he knew obviously the entire repertoire; he knew what you should eat before a concert and what you shouldn't eat; and how much sleep you need. His master book, the Art of Violin playing, which is read by billions of people, covers practically everything which a violinist needs. When he gave his lessons, you were required to give him your music (everybody was supposed to play by heart); he developed a short-hand and he made, with his pencil, short remarks. When you played he never interrupted you. When you finished, then he read the verdict. Here you did this, and this was faulty mechanism in your lower right arm, and for that you do 10 minutes of exercises of this and this and this. And so you went through all his remarks which were erasable. He really was the greatest violin teacher I happen to meet. But what I wanted to mention, that once you get into the status of having the reputation of being a great violin teacher like Hubay had, and Auer had, and later Flesch had, and Sevcik had, then it is a self-perpetuating business because that means that all the talents in the surroundings rush to you and want to study with you. Then you have a pool of talents out of which you select the ones who are the most likely to be successful and propagate your great reputation. This goes on. When I came to America much later that was the situation of Galamian - he had 12 assistants but you were not a violinist if you did not have on your resume that you were a Galamian student. His number of assistants prepared his students - and Juilliard having this fantastic reputation of getting good students - so he got the best ones; they all graduated as Galamian students, enhancing his reputation. One of his students was Dorothy Delay; who together with my later partner, Andy Toth, were his students and played in a Juilliard student orchestra. Both of them became assistants to Galamian. Until a certain time, when Dorothy got enough of this, and she said, "OK, but I am going to be independent and I will raise my own students." She told me this story herself. She is a marvelous person and a great teacher and all that. She said that when she told Galamian that she

was quitting him as an assistant, until his death, he never spoke a word to her. Strangely enough, Dorothy Delay is now exactly in the same position. She has hundreds and hundreds of students, and 12 assistants and she is the queen of violin teaching. It is just a phenomenon. Because it is easy to teach great talents; they teach themselves. The great teacher is like Carl Flesch who can help people who have difficulties. There are so many great players who have such great facility on their instrument - piano, violin, or whatever, that they are unable to understand students who don't have this, and they are bad teachers.

So anyway, I spent a year in Berlin. I came home.

One other incident from my younger years in the Academie, besides our multiple chores and our ping-pong games, we went to concerts; but we were very selective. We went only to concerts which were very-highly publicized; the performers were our idols like Huberman, who we thought was the greatest violinist in the world, and in a sense, I still believe it, it was before the arrival of Heifitz - maybe he was not as smooth as Heifitz, but he was such a tremendous atmosphere. so when Huberman played was so popular - he played 5 or 6 concerts a year only in Budapest. So we went. and whenever Josef Szegeti played we highly admired him; but if Fritz Kreilser came, very seldom, but we went; Rachmaninoff came and we went. There were dozens of concerts every day in Budapest and when you went to Academie there was a list of concerts that students could get free tickets. So one day we didn't go - there was no celebrity - our technique was, because nobody had money and those concerts were relatively expensive, so our gang went to the concert and bought - early - the cheapest available tickets. One of us went us in the secure possession of a valid ticket - he had enough self-confidence to get in behind the guard and not get his ticket punched; then he went up and borrowed a punched ticket and came back with it saying that he has to go to the toilet or to make a phone call, and gave the free ticket to -- so that was our technique to get to those concerts.

I wanted to tell that there was a piano concert with an unknown pianist - unknown name to us - announced and students would get free tickets. But we disdained to go to a relatively unimportant concert and instead went to play ping-pong. Some people went; the press was there - it was their duty - the next morning the papers blazed with red headlines - the sensation of the year. This - you never heard piano playing like this. The concert was repeated to a sold house the next day; and we missed it because we played ping-pong. The name of the pianist who was unknown at that time was Vladimir Horowitz. Well,

when I came back from Berlin, there were always chamber music players so we wanted to play string quartets, so Sandor Vegh, who was my longest and best friend, and under the leadership of a Hungarian

cellist by the name of Vilmos Polatai who was 6 years older than us and more experienced - we were about 18 years old or something, and in 1935 - no I was 22. In 35 the Hungarian Quartet was formed. Vilmos Polatai was, he spent years in Berlin as student at the Hochschuler, and then was teaching in Prague, came back, he was a very fine musician, fabulous ears. He was our cellist. There were about 3 violinists - the third one changed later, several times, but anyway, with about the same capacities but somebody had to play the viola. As I had more experience with viola in chamber music classes then the rest, so I said, OK , then I will play the viola, not anticipating the grave consequences that I will never touch the violin again in my life. Because the quartet happened to be successful so I became a violist.

And so we practiced but there was, in the first place, a resident Hungarian quartet which was called the Waldbauer-Kerpely which was there since the beginning of the century; they were excellent musicians and it was a very good quartet; and very forward looking; and they were of the age group of Bartok and Kodaly who were professors. Bartok's first 2 quartets are dedicated to the Waldbauer Quartet, and Kodaly says, "Well,

He (Waldbauer) was our teacher in string quartet playing. When we graduated, for some reason, he liked me seemingly, as a friend, to his home very often. Basically, I think, because he liked to play bridge. And I was a very good bridge player. I also suspect he wanted me to marry his daughter, but I cannot confirm that. One evening I arrived for a bridge game and coming in his living room there was a piano and on his piano was a manuscript; and the manuscript; at that time we were such admirers of Bartok or some of us at least; saw it from 10 feet distance it is a manuscript of Bartok. Until then, with our quartet, we wanted to play and we thought we played pretty well; but the horizon was full of world-famous quartets like the ProArte, and the Kolisch, and the Lerner, and the Roth, and the Budapest, and all of that .... And they occupied all the places. And we only thought that we played Schubert and Mozart as well as they do, which probably wasn't true, but anyway, so we wanted to, but we couldn't simply get engagements which we wanted and especially we wanted to get out of Hungary. So we played pieces which nobody else did, from composers whose name nobody heard of before and after, like Fiddleberg, Jolivet, Vladimir Fogel; If it went, radio engagement or something. And we were virtuosos in learning in very short time those pieces which we played; and benefited from some sort of private concert in a home in Switzerland or radio concert somewhere else. So anyway, in coming in, We rehearsed from 7 to 9 in the morning; after that everyone went to their orchestra job; had to survive. so I see this manuscript, and I ask, "Well, what is this?" "It is Bartok." He said, "Bela just sent over the Manuscript of his 5th quartet. The first and second quartet was dedicated to the Waldbauer Quartet; even the 3rd and the 4th which are not, they were obviously in the position in Hungary to make the first Hungarian performance of all the Bartok quartets, and so Bartok sent them, they were friends, sent them the copy. I said to Waldbauer, "May I borrow this for a few days?" He said," Ah, you know we

are so busy and looking at this it looks pretty difficult, so why not. Take it."

The next morning I arrived at the rehearsal at 7:00 with the glory, "I have it!" Immediately calls went out to our composer friends, pupils of Kodaly who became later on very well-known composers themselves, Paul Kadosa and Sandor Veress. when they heard that a new Bartok work that nobody ever heard, ever saw, was out; they took taxis and in 5 minutes they arrive. They took the score apart - 5 movements - so I think Kadosa got the first 2 movements and Veress got the 3 last movements. They went home and copied by hand; because unfortunately Xerox was not invented yet. In the meantime, they were interested in music and composers, so it was not a chore. They brought back and glued together the score and gave it back to Waldbauer and then we went on to write out our own parts from the copies of our friends, which we did. Then we started to rehearse - it was devilishly difficult. At that time, the students of our generations were not so trained in contemporary music and complicated and irregular rhythms and all that. Today's students absorb those difficulties much easier than we did. But we went on bravely; learned the piece in a few week's time; and then we called Bartok and said we can play his 5th quartet, which Bartok certainly was not a person who was - proud - there is no composer in the world who does not want to hear his own music, especially for the first time. The quartet was commissioned by the Library of Congress in Washington; and the first performance belonged to them, to be done by the American resident Kolisch Quartet. But in Europe it was free. So Bartok came and listened to us. He came for a whole week, every single day, and coached us. And then at the end of the week, "Well, OK, boys," No he didn't say boys, much too serious for that, "Gentlemen, you have the right for the first performance in Europe."

Well, that was actually the foundation of the fame of the Hungarian Quartet because the International organization for contemporary music, which is a big organization world-wide, held a festival every year in different capitols of the world, and the member states collected the year's production of their own composers and selected them which they thought worth-while; sent up to the International commission which again selected from those works which are going to be performed at the festivals. And so it happened that the first string quartet of Sandor Veress, who I mentioned earlier, was selected for the Festival in 35 in Prague, which was the site for the Festival. Somebody had to play it, and obviously, so we were the ones to play it. But it was financial difficulties; they didn't pay; and then when they knew we were coming anyway so then they put on our neck a quartet by a English composer named Allan Bush, who never; then we had to learn two. But anyway, we went there and the whole international community and press and all that; so we made seemingly some success. We went there - the organizator of the next festival, in 36, which was to take place in Barcelona. We told him that we have the 5th quartet of Bartok in our repertoire, which nobody else did, in Europe at least. And, so that was very crucial because they had money; at that time, it was just

before the outbreak of the civil war in France; the left-wing government very much was liberal with helping the arts; and the festival had money; so we were offered free second-class train tickets from Budapest to Barcelona and back; and free lodging in a pension which was huge sum for us and great opportunity. So we went there. Those festivals were actually a bore. because there were 4 or 5 concerts daily; choral and orchestral and solo and chamber music - you name them. And not every year brings out master works. Most of the pieces were mediocre or uninteresting or boring; people who were devotees of contemporary music came to those festivals and whole international press; after the two weeks or 10 days everyone was so exhausted by the meaningless of this whole thing; started to lose faith in the beliefs. I remember, our concert was in the second week of the festival. It was an endless works of chamber music, piano, trio, whatever it was. The quartet was scheduled at the end of the program and coming in, I met Ansermet, the famous Swiss conductor who was there conducting.

And I said to him, Why don't you come because this work is really a masterpiece. Ansermet said, Oh, my God, no way, I am so tired, we had rehearsals and tomorrow morning we have rehearsals; but, Bartok I know, of course, and I am interested, so maybe I come and listen for a movement and all that, and I have to go home and rest because I'm dead tired. And so at this endless concert, with a disconsolate audience, we played, probably we didn't play badly, we played well. That was the sensation of the festival. Suddenly all those people who were losing faith with contemporary music realize that you write masterworks; and Bartok 5th quartet is one of his greatest masterworks. And there was an ovation; we had many successes later on, but I don't remember anything as warm. And Ansermet, who, before the concert - came with absolutely red face and hugged us. We were part of the success whether the success was obviously for the rejuvenation of the faith in contemporary music.

The other great event of the same festival was the first performance of Alban Berg's violin concerto.

Coming back to our struggling years, the first few years of the existence of the Hungarian String Quartet, I would like to tell a story which is perhaps interesting. I told previously about our only way to get engagements and recognition, which was to play pieces which nobody else played. So it happened that a former colleague of my cellist Vilmos Polatai, Hungarian composer who was pupil of Kodaly - but every Hungarian composer was pupil of Kodaly. He at young age got to America and seemingly did very well; his name was Tibor Serling. When he came home to visit his own country, he was honored by offering him a concert of his own works and quite obviously he had a string quartet and quite obviously we learned the string quartet and played it. and then we assaulted him with questions about how to get to America. He wisely explained that, in the first place, there are great visa

difficulties to get to the United States, and in the second place, your reputation is not as good yet as it will be , perhaps in the future. Anyway, the Kolisch and the ProArte are up there, and the Budapest Quartet is reigning all over America, so I don't really see a good chance. But let me think how I can help you someway. I have a friend, an American poet, who lives in Rappola which is a charming city on the Italian Riviera in the NE of Italy, who is a great music lover and who especially loves Bartok very much. Living there, he organized a little concert society where he is inviting people whom he likes to perform. He doesn't have too much money, but why don't I put you in contact with him, Which he did. Soon, after several months long correspondence - this man surely warned us that he is a bit crazy. He wrote letters - 10-12 pages each - only one sentence on one page, all in different languages - Latin and Greek and Italian and English and French, and you name it. I don't think Sanskrit was in it. It was hilarious. As I was a very young man, nevertheless I prided myself that I was a literate person. I had several friends who were budding writers and poets and all that; I entertained them by bringing those hilarious letters of this mad American poet, and we laughed our heads off. But finally, the correspondence led to a real engagement; although the fee was rather low, but we somehow managed to get a management on the Swiss-Italian radio on the way in Lugano; so we came out clean. It didn't cost us money; didn't earn anything anyway.. One day we arrive in Rappolo. There was this fellow; very imposing, tall, red-bearded man who was waiting for us. He was the man about whom I was talking. He put us up in a cheap hotel. He said, why don't you come up to my place, let us talk about tomorrow's concert, the program, and so forth. He had a huge attic room on top of the house with a glorious view of the bay. After climbing innumerable stairs, you burst into a large studio where he lived peacefully with his wife and his mistress. First thing which struck when you came in; right in front of the entrance on the wall was an absolutely frighteningly stuffed 11 feet long shark, which was very imposing, which called your attention whether you wanted to or not. So I asked him, ... " Oh, I got it from Ernest." Then we talked, and he suggested that we take a walk on the beach which we did. Then I was talking to him; tho I was literate in a sense that I read not only the Hungarian literature but the great German literature from Hesse to Hunne, Dostoesvky, Tolstoy; and I read French contemporary literature because my French was good enough for that; so I considered myself a literature person. But I didn't know English and didn't know anything about American literature. Except, before all this happened, there was an anthology published in Hungarian translation of short stories of American writers from the beginning of the century who for some reason, I never discovered what reason, were called the Lost Generation = like Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and Hemingway - that group of talented and very great writers. And I read those short stories. Walking with this American poet, I said, I wanted to show off at my ripe age of 23, saying to him, I read this short story of Willacarte, which I liked very much. He very benevolently walked beside me and said, "Yeah, OK. Well, Willacarte is 2nd rate for me."

And then I got furious and got in a big argument about Willacarte. And then the concert passed and we went home and I told my literary friends who were obviously much better informed than I was about this meeting; Then one of them, it was Gesar Otlick, who was a budding writing and who at the end of the century was the toast of Hungary. His books had to be read in high school. He was my life-long best friend and he always claimed that I was his life-long best friend. And he said, "Wait a moment. You are in contact with somebody very important." Obviously we knew his name, and he said it was Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound, I never heard the name, because his poetry was not translated and was not known in Hungary. He was one of the towering figures of the entire literary life. His Cantos revolutionized English language poetry. He was helping Elliot finish his Wasteland, helping James Joyce to publish his books, and he was the closest friend of Hemingway. So that explained the shark which he got from Hemingway, which he caught somewhere. so it was kind of a shock that I, a whipper snapper, was discussing literature with one of those giants. But he was very nice about it. Then later on we came for a second visit, and that is the last I heard of him because the War was about to break out, and seemingly literary genius doesn't always correspond with political insight. Because he was a tremendous Fascist and supporter of Mussolini. During the War years he was talking on Italian radio inflammatory remarks about American policy and especially Roosevelt. Like at the same time, in Hitler's Germany, Lord Howehowe who was an Englishman and who lived in Berlin and made war propaganda against the English.

Well, anyway, when the war was over, he was caught, and he was a traitor. He would have been hanged, executed, anyway as a traitor. But the outcry of the intellectual community and the whole world was so strong that you cannot execute one of the great geniuses of the time, so they declared him insane and put him up in an insane asylum somewhere in Virginia. When he entered there, he said that everybody outside was insane, I was the only sane person.

About the second visit, he wrote to Tibor Serling later that he took us out for dinner, he said, "Oh, those boys are really nice boys. They play really very well. The only thing is that the violist eats too much." and that was me. I never saw him again.

So, after our appearance in the festival in the society of contemporary music festival in Barcelona, because the whole world press was there, and the Bartok 5th quartet was, as I described, such a tremendous success, and some of it reflected on us; so we got some engagements and management started to be interested in our career. We got offers and so we got a few concerts in Holland also. and during our first years as a quartet, with Vegh being the first violin and Polatai the cellist. Polatai was always was remembering that his former colleague whom he knew very well, and who really he considered that if we want to be the best string quartet in the world, than we should somehow get him to join the

quartet because, well, he said, Vegh is fine and talented and all that; but he is not of the same caliber. And so, we had a concert in Amsterdam and this friend was Zoltan Szekely. who lived in Holland. As a very young man he got there, but before he left, even as a student, Bartok chose him as his sonata partner and made concert tours together. So he was very closely attached to Bartok. Bartok was obviously much older than he, but he was a friend of Bartok, and whenever Bartok came to Holland, he stayed at his house. In Holland, he married a wealthy Dutch woman, lived very comfortably, and built himself a house. He pursued soloist career which was not sensational, but was going well. So he came to our concert and invited us to his house. And we sat - discussions - and finally it is ended that he is ready to join the quartet, but that he said, you know I am settled here in Holland, Dutch wife, and Dutch citizen. It is only possible if you people move to Holland. As none of us married and we were very young. The war was about to break out anyway. Holland had, for the first big war, held up the hope that they be out of the war because they remained out of the First world war as neutrals. So we had no objection, so we went out and started to rehearse with Zoltan. That was in 1937. Hitler was already in power in Germany. The situation in Hungary was turning more and more to Nazism, so we were glad to leave.

And, so our career started. We were very much liked in Holland, we played allot in Holland, we had great public support and great support from the press. They called us "Our Hungarians" and we were popular. We lived there and got some engagements; had tours in North Africa .. so our career really started, though it was not big by all means. Then the war broke out. In the intervening years when I was still living in Budapest. there was an amazing number of absolutely gorgeous beautiful girls, and I fell in love with a number of them, most of them unsuccessful; until finally I got to Suzie, who was not only very beautiful but she was highly intelligent; she had a double major at the university; she was writing her Ph.D. thesis on English pre-Renaissance literature. After a long courtship I married her, just a few weeks before the outbreak of the war in 39; we went together to Holland.

Well, it didn't turn out as well as expected, because, well, the war started out with Hitler invading Poland, and France and England mobilizing , but after the occupation of Poland, the whole winter, nothing happened. There was no war. It was status of war where >>>> was put off and all that. Finally, my wife Suzie, who was also a very talented writer, she got pregnant. Her parents insisted that she should go home for the delivery; because she had an uncle who was a very famous gynecologist and who delivered her when she was a baby; and being in a strange country and all that, so her parents insisted that she is going home. so I accompanied her to the frontier, she left on May 9, 1939 - no 1940. When she arrived in Budapest with a long train ride, she was able to call me on the phone and telling me that she had successfully arrived. The next day, the great May offensive of Hitler started, and they run over Poland and Belgium and went behind the field Majino line of France. In a few months

time they conquered all of Europe and chased out t the British army in Northern Europe. So the war started. The first years, Holland was a very wealthy country, because for 300 years they owned the West Indies, which is Indonesia now; and with all the rubber plantations and all that. so the country got very rich. Not ostentatiously rich, but everyone had beautiful homes, there were tremendous reserves and all that. So in the first year of the war, the Germans came in and declared that the Dutch were eligible as Aryans so they incorporated Holland into the great German Reich - the great German empire. The Belgiums for instance didn't make it because they were not considered pure Aryans; they had military occupation. But we had military, of course, but we part of the German empire and we had SeisInquar as a governor and we had the entire weight of the Gestapo on the country which was hunting the houses for the Jews. It was starting to be bad and got successively worse with every single year. My wife, who was, instead of finishing her thesis on English literature, we had two sons born during the war. She was washing diapers in cold water because there was no warm water. We went through 5 very difficult years. In spite of this, we kept together and rehearsed, and learned the Beethoven cycle. Evening rehearsals. By the end of the war, it got really very bad ...

So that was basically - there was no food whatsoever, even though Holland was an agricultural country; but the German s took precedence and took everything. The basic occupation of everybody was to go out to the farmers and bag for grain or sugar beets or whatever to eat. And money had no value whatsoever. The price of a sack of potatoes, for instance, on the black-market, was 2 or 3,000 florins. So what farmers did was to exchange some food, which they could dispense of, with clothing and gold and jewelry - became, in the meantime, very rich... Because everybody was rich, except we - and they had reserves of jewelry and clothing and all that, so they did a little bit better than we; but we were really hungry. and then came the Normandy invasion of the Allied forces; then France was liberated and De Gaulle was back in Paris; and Belgium was liberated; but ..... for Holland, was somehow lost. So for the last year, which was called, the Hunger Winter, Holland was isolated - the German garrison was still there, without communication with Germany itself; but, and the resistance against the Germans was tremendous. Everybody was talking about the French resistance, and the Belgium resistance - this was nothing. There was no man, or very slow percentage of the population, was pro-German. Everyone was organized in resistance movements and nobody stepped home; and the Queen and her husband, Prince Bermet in London, from London, declared that resistance should put up a general strike, which was done. Suddenly, all the trains stopped running, electricity was cut off, there was nothing. There was cold. It was an exceptionally cold winter for Holland. There was cold and hunger. so we went through this winter of tremendous suffering. My two little kids probably don't remember as I didn't remember anything of the harshness of the first world war, they don't remember anything. Somehow we managed to feed them. In the nights we listened - well, during the days as well - to the over-flying British came to bomb Germany to smithereens during the night and the Americans came during the day

and bombed out Dresden and Hamburg and all that. So it was obvious that the war was about to end pretty soon and we just saluted all those airplanes and wished them good luck. They were shot at, but ineffectively. And finally, it was a glorious day in May, 1945, that finally those planes flew over slowly and nobody was shooting at them, and started dropping things. The war ended. The Germans capitulated. There was such an incredible need, because - there was no food, people were on verge of dying. So those planes which flew over for years delivering bombs, suddenly dropped food. The last casualty in Holland of the War was a poor man who was hit by a sack of food.

Well, anyway, so the war was over. Then our career really started. Holland was recuperating. It was totally rubbed out. Every machinery from every factory was taken off the -- rails were taken off and back to Germany, and they lost our colonies; so it was a few years of recuperation, but this was very tough people and they did it very well. And in 4 or 5 years they came back; and even without the colonists they are still quite a well to-do country.

But we were - except Seckai, who was Dutch citizen - we were Hungarians, so we depended on our Hungarian passport. After the Communists took over Hungary after the War, they, for some reason, not explained to us, they ceased to renew our Passport; our lives depended on traveling. So we were stateless people, because we were liked in Holland. And the Dutch government gave us alien passports which looked exactly like original Dutch passports, a little bit different color, and signed by the Queen and, it looked very nice, official document. But it was unbelievably difficult to get visas. They was such a horde of status people milling in the East and wanting to go the West; and both France and Belgium and Holland - they were very careful to let people in because they were afraid they would stay; so we stayed more time in consulates to get visas then rehearsing, but somehow we managed and on the other hand, a good part of it was there was absolutely no competition. We were, I think, a very good string quartet. The great old ones folded up - the Pro Arte didn't fold up, but changed; the Kolisch folded up, and they were in America anyway. The Amadeus was not born yet. The new Italian quartet was just fledgling their wings. We had practically the music-hungry Europe at our feet and we could play 150 concerts a year if we wanted to. One of the places we were very much liked and we visited every month was in London the BBC who sent out - there was no TV at that time - it was radio. We had so many radio concerts - we played very often there and were popular. After one of those sessions came out in the corridors of the BBC - saw lots of musicians milling around. It happened that the BBC orchestra, which was one of the best orchestras in England, was having a break. An older man, could have been my father or grandfather, came up to me and introduced himself that he is playing viola in the BBC orchestra for 4 years and he wanted to meet me; and we had a friendly conversation- what violists talk about - bowing, fingerings, and occasionally girls. He said, "you know, I have a son, Bill, who is a darn good violist." I said, "Oh, that is so interesting." "Oh, he is in America." I said,"Well we are going to

America next month. Maybe I can meet him and tell him that I talked with his Dad." "Oh, that would be nice." "What is his name?" "His name is Bill." "But his last name?" He said, "Primrose, like mine."

Then, we lived until the end of the 40's in Holland and traveled all over Europe and somehow solved our vis a problems, but then came the Berlin crisis, when the Russians closed off Berlin which was by this peace agreement, internationally controlled by the British and French and Russians. And stopped the British flights; and this was a very high crisis. And it looked very much like again the war was about to break out, this time between Russia and the West. So, we, like everybody else, would like to emigrate to America. Would feel safer because we went through 2 wars already, so this was plenty. So we inquired as to the possibilities. The laws, at that time, maybe they have changed since, were that every country outside of America had a certain quota, which meant that certain number of people were allotted to emigrate to the United States. These quotas varied: the Northern Countries, Sweden and Norway and all that had high quotas; the Hungarian quotas was very low. What counted was not what citizen you were, the only thing that counted was where you were born. And even Zoltan Szekely, who was primarius, was a Dutch citizen with a Dutch passport, he, in order to emigrate to America, he would fall into the Hungarian quota, which according to our information was filled for 135 years, so there was no possibilities. But there were 3 exemptions from the quota system, 3 categories: priests, didn't fall under the quota, and farmers who could purchase land and farm were also exempted, and university professors. Now, we had our first American tour at that time; we played all over the country and also in Los Angeles. The Dean of the USC, the Dean of the Music School there, which was a very good music school, by the way, asked us if we could be in residence there. Because we seemingly had very successful, Well, we said well, residence where we travel and have so many concerts in 5 continents, but we agreed on something that we would spend 6 weeks every year there and give lectures and concerts. And that was what we really wanted. That was a document proving we were engaged by a higher learning institution in America, and that was missing; otherwise you had to assemble an unbelievable number of documents and papers and all that to qualify you for coming, that you never had tuberculosis; all kinds of unbelievable difficult things which we all had very cautiously assembled. And we were daily guests at the American consulate in the Hague and were counseled what to do and what not. We were expecting this contract from USC to arrive and which would finalize our possible immigration to America, but we were engaged in very long tour in South America. And we checked the mail everytime; and it didn't come and didn't come. Finally, we found ourselves in Mexico City. Finally this contract from USC arrived. The next morning with all our papers and the contract, ran to the American consulate and presented our documents and presented the contract. The consul was looking them over very carefully and slowly, and said, "Gentlemen, I don't see any reason why I should refuse your immigration visa." So he said very casually, "By the way, where do you teach in Europe." We said, " Well, look, we are world-famous artists, we have 150 concerts, we do not have time to teach."

"Oh,"he said,"then I don't think I can give you his visas. He pushed back out all of our documents; because the exemption was for university professors in one place to university professors in America and not for somebody who was not. And, we, not knowing that we, ... so at that point, I said in Hungarian to my colleagues, "maybe we can find some solution to that," and to our greatest amazement the consul interrupted my sentence in perfect Hungarian (in Hungarian, of course), "If you gentlemen have private things to discuss, do not do it in my presence." It seems he had been consul in Budapest for a number of years, was a genius in languages, so that was it. Nevertheless we went back to Europe and played a free concert for a friends music school, and in exchange the director gave us certificates that we were teachers at that school. Obviously avoiding Mexico City, we emigrated through Canada and Buffalo. That was in 1950. We settled in Los Angeles for 12 years.

In the meantime, in Holland, Vegh was our 2nd violinist when Skeley joined us. After a year or so, he felt that it was not what he really wanted to do. He left us and went back to Hungary. Formed his own string quartet. He made a very successful career - his quartet existed for decades and it was highly rated and he himself as a teacher made a big career. Unfortunately I lost contact with him later, but in my student years, we were the best of friends. And then we needed a 2nd violinist. There was a Russian violinist living in Holland who had his own string quartet. He was a year or two older than Szekely, who was again 10 years older than me and Sandor. And, his quartet dissolved; that was before the outbreak of the war; he divorced his wife; he was ready to immigrate to America. He only had a visa; when we offered him the post of 2nd violin which he gladly accepted. He became the 2nd violinist for 20 years in the first edition of the Hungarian Quartet. He was a polyglot (by the way, he was also a student of Leopold Auer in St.Petersburg), besides his native Russian, he spoke flawless German, flawless French, flawless English, flawless Italian; he learned languages very easily. Being a member of the Hungarian Quartet for 20 years, he never learned Hungarian although he tried. He gave up saying,"This is a barbaric language."

After settling in the United States, we toured all the continents. We had tours in Australia 3 times, in South Africa 3 times, in South America 3 times; basically we always went back to Europe - which was our; we played of course allot of concerts in the United States as well, but Europe was our place of birth, they liked us, and we had lots to do, and we had a rewarding recording contract, and we made records - we made, in this first formation with Moskowski and Polatai, the entire Beethoven cycle for EMI which was at that time, the greatest record company in the world. Maybe it still is. It comprising Columbia,, his Master's Voice, Pathe Marconi, and German affiliate and all that. We had a contract with the French affiliate which was Pathe Marconi, and we made all our records there. So we made, I think in 3 months time, all the 17 Beethoven quartets and every year the French gave our the Grande Prix du Disc, which means the grand prize of records, and we got this in the mid-50's. And then, a few

years later, Palotai left the quartet for health reasons, and a few years later Moskowski left the quartet too - We re-organized, and Gabriel Magyar came in as cellist and Michael Kuttner came in as 2nd violinist; finally the quartet was fully Hungarian, so we could talk Hungarian. As long as Moskowski was there we had to talk in Dutch or in English later on.

Our career went on, rather upwards. One of the episodes which is perhaps funny is that we played allot everywhere, but we played allot in Switzerland as well. There is a place at the Lake of Geneva which is called Vevey, which is a small place but is quite near to Montreux which was winter watering place for the British aristocracy with casinos and luxury hotels and all that. Vevey is just walking distance from that place. It is not famous for anything else but was the headquarters for Nestle, which was a world-wide corporation making coffee and Nescafe and chocolate; and had headquarters buildings in Vevey. One of the directors of Nestle was a great music lover and he was a friend - that was all before our time - he was a friend of Cortot, the great French pianist. he formed a chamber music - actually a music society - in Vevey. The famous trio of Cortot -Thibauld-Casals were opening this series and were frequently coming back and playing. Besides inviting world-famous artists. That was a small community which was very intellectual. So many artists lived there. If you. They had a very nice old theatre, which was all wood - and we had marvelous acoustics. Later on we became, somehow, darlings of Vevey, so we played , I don't know, I didn't count it, 35 or 40 in Amsterdam and so much in Paris. But I counted we played 35 times in Vevey, because we were children at home. so we had so many friends. If we played in the theatre and somebody after a piece was finished was shouting loudly, "Bravo," then we knew it was Oscar Hunshoka, and on the reception there was Madame Furtwangler and Madame shureek and Paul Morande, the great French writer was living there, lots of painters. So it was very exciting in this small community. As we came back practically ever year. The only time when we were in Australia or something we couldn't come back, they would hear some other quartet. They only had 1 quartet concert a year. The regular guests were wilhelm Barchos, the great French pianist who came very often - and finally they put us together with Barchas and we played quintets together several times. And Clara Haskell, who was one of the great woman pianists of the time - Rumanian woman pianist, living in Vevey - actually there is a street, Clara Haskell street in Vevey. But I knew they were very good hosts; and knew that never ate supper, dinner, before a concert. So, and after every concert there was a reception in one of the private homes or at the hotel or whatever. Then, rec eptions were always 50 or 60 people milling around with good white wine; but we were in separate room served bifstek and full supper because we didn't have anything. We wouldn't be satisfied with the little toasts or whatever they were serving around in the reception room. So we were sitting there - that was still in the time with Moskowski - and , but we were all residents of America, talked English - and then, an elderly man, very well-clad, and incredibly familiar face, comes into our room, who seems to have been lost. Everybody from France and Switzerland, everybody was talking French and he

obviously didn't talk any French. Hearing that we were talking English he asked whether he could sit with us and talk. and he introduced himself, "my name is Charles Chaplin." Now we were totally floored; he was our idol when we were kids; saw his silent films, "Tramp" and all that. He sits down at our table and starts to entertain us for half an hour which is - gesticulations and pantomimes - that was totally mistakeably .... He told us wonderful stories. He just came out from America where he lived all his life, where he formed with Mary Pickford United Artists and he was a multi-millionaire. But during the McCarthy era he was labeled as a Communist; because during the war Russia was an ally of the United States, and sometimes on some occasion Roosevelt had to make a speech which he couldn't fulfill so he asked Chaplin to make the speech and this was a very Russian-friendly speech. Nevertheless, he lived in America and became a millionaire in America and produced films and all that, but he never took out American citizenship; he remained English because he came from England. So, during the McCarthy era, he was pushed to emigration. He came to Switzerland, purchased a very large property in one of the most expensive real estate areas of the world - behind the mountains behind Vevey and the hills - and he just moved in and wanted to get the feeling of the town where he was and came down and came to this concert. In the meantime, he told us that his silent films were always advertising that he wrote the accompanying music himself, but he said that this was absolutely ridiculous, I am not a musician, I do not know anything about music. But what happens, sometimes a little tune comes to my mind when I am walking; a whole army of composers and radio people come after me and take it up and work it out and that is advertised as my composition.

But anyway, at the end of the conversation, he felt that we should join the crowd because they wanted to see us. Suddenly somebody, it was around midnight, somebody was playing the piano and playing it very well. So we went in and it was Clara Haskell, about whom I told you, was an absolutely phenomenal woman pianist. Together with Annie Fischer they were the greatest woman pianists in the epoch. She was much older than Annie Fischer. She was the ugliest woman you ever saw - she was hunchback, her nose hanging to her mouth - unbelievably ugly. She could have served as a model in Hitler's publications of >>>>> Jews. But when she played, then by a miracle, she became beautiful. It was such an unbelievable transcendent expression in her face when she played that was a joy to watch her. though .

Chaplin came up into the main room, though he didn't know anything about music, but, in the first place, he was an actor. He was watching those changes in the face and he was absolutely fascinated. And Clara Haskell, with whom we played several times, music together, she was a good friend, but she was the most modest person in the world. She was so retiring and she was always in the background. There was a story in Vevey before our time that she had a sonata recital in Vevey with Pablo Casals. The recital didn't start for half an hour. Casals was a gentlemen, he said that the lady should go first. She was, "I cannot go before this great man as Casals," so they were discussing this for

half an hour. Finally they came out together.
Well, anyway, Chaplin approached her after she finished her playing, and introduced himself, she like us, but like more, she fell to her knees to meet the great, great Charlie Chaplin. That was how the evening ended.

Next year we came back, played and then we asked our friends, practically everybody was our friend there; we knew our audience by first name. We played there so often. whatever is the story, they said,"Well, since they met last year at the reception, they became inseparable friends. And whenever Clara not concert tour, they see each other, and ask, "Where is the reception tonight?" There were 4 big limousines waiting for us; drove us up to the mountains to a fabulous palace, home, where Chaplin lived with Oona O'Neill which was 5th or 6th wife, and they just had, although he must have been at least 65 or something, but they just had a baby. But they lived there, and obviously Clara was there too. and Chaplin still speak a word of French and Clara still didn't speak a word of English, so I asked Chaplin, "Well, how on earth do you communicate,". And he said, "You know, pantomime was always a little bit my trade!" so that is my memory of Switzerland, Clara Haskill, and Charlie Chaplin.

One of the other maybe funny incidents was that, in our tours, wherever we were in Europe or Australia or in the States, it was customary that after the concert some of the people came into offer the congratulations or opinions or whatever, and that is part of our routine. Then you stay there and accept the remarks and try to be as friendly as possible; that is automatic; that was ingrained. An amazing amount of women that come in and talk to us in appreciation. Come up at the end of the conversation, "You know I have a kid who is son or daughter who is playing very well the cymbal or the trombone or the viola or the piano, and all that. Then we, that was also routine, "How interesting, and how is he doing, how is she doing." It happens all the time, so as I say it was quite a routine. And once we - for years and years - totally accustomed to it. We played in Marseilles which was a big port city in the south of France; and it was a very elite concert and, I think, it was kind of a women's club. All the ladies in French, Paris clothes and big hats on, and some of them came in - again, the routine. Some offered the congratulations, and leaves. The next one comes and she talks for a little bit longer time, and finally she says, "You know, I have a son who is a violinist." "Oh, no, here we go again. " OK how is the little one doing." "Oh, he is not a little one, he is an adult and he is doing very well." I said, "Well, how nice." Then she departed and the next lady came, and her first question was, "did you have a nice conversation with Madame Fransecatti?" Floored again.

Well, before continuing my abbreviated life story, after our emigration to the United States, I would like to say a few words about a great musician whose name was Ernst von Dohnanyi. He was an exceptional musician, the type which doesn't exist right now. You could even him as a Renaissance

musician. Because nowadays, practically everybody is a specialist. Dohnanyi was a phenomenal pianist; in his youth he had the world open for him from Carnegie Hall to Berlin and Vienna and Budapest and all that; but he was also highly gifted composer who, at the age of 17, wrote what is called, the Op. 1, the piano quintet with strings. And when it was shown to Brahms, Brahms said, I couldn't have done it better. He had the entire piano repertoire in his head, so did he have the entire orchestra repertoire in his head. He married and settled in Berlin; continued his solo career; but, something happened. He fell in love with Elsa Galafre who was pantomime dancer and my mother told me that she saw him as a young dancer and she was absolutely enchanting and beautiful. She also happened to be the wife of Bronislav Huberman who was one of our great idols as a violin player, probably the greatest ever. So he, divorced his wife, and took away Elsa Galafre; in the meantime he got an invitation to head the piano department a the Academie of Franz Liszt in Budapest which he accepted; seemingly that's a legend, maybe not true, but there was betcher with parapluies on the street with Huberman; but anyway, so he took Elsa with him to Budapest. She had a young son from Huberman. So this young man was my age, and he grew up as a Hungarian. He was not a musician and, we as musicians always wonder why should somebody be blessed with having two fathers who are great, towering figures in the musical world, when we as musicians, didn't have that luxury. Anyway, he grew up and he was a good friend, Ollie, and he was as Hungarian as I am. He lived in Budapest and later became a businessman. I met him later on ; he emigrated to Vancouver, took his mother there. Elsa she was the faithful wife of Dohnanyi, she was neither beautiful or charming; she was Aunti Elsa for us. she guarded Dohnanyi like a Cyberus. We knew her ... But Dohnanyi was the type of person that if you gave him a subject, he could improvise a complete and technically perfect fugue on it. He gave, when he was in Budapest, and already a Vice-Director of the Academie next to Hubay and head of the piano department; he gave many concerts a year in Budapest; always sold out. He was highly liked. Usually on the day of his recital, he went in to the management and asked, "What I am playing tonight?" so he never practiced, but he play. and occasionally, obviously, he got lost. It is easy to get lost in the fugue of the Hammerklavier or wherever else. that was great fun, because he improvised himself out in perfectly in the style of whatever piece he was playing. Instead of ending in a scandal, it was a joy to watch his virtuosity of getting out of trouble. Obviously, by today's standards, that would be totally unacceptable; but for us it was positively ;miraculous what he could do.

Well anyway, when Hubay died in the late 30's, he became the Director General of the Academie. He was very nice. When we formed our quartet in 35 and then the next year we gave a series of concerts in Budapest. We asked him if he would like to play one of his quintets with us; and he immediately agreed and he did; and we went up to his home to rehearse; and he didn't accept a penny; which we didn't have anyway. And so he certainly wasn't an anti-
Semite, but at that time Hitler was growing, Nazis was growing, even Budapest too. And all my great

pianist friends were his students. The first one to mention is obviously Annie Fischer who won, in the early 30's the Franz Liszt Competition, for piano, when Dohnanyi was head of the jury. He made her win against an onslaught of the Russian virtuosos who stormed into this; but, certainly opened the world for Annie who became the world star. But so was Edy Kilenyi, Andor Földes, and Solochanyi Szolchanyi all my pianist friends were his students. Then he was elevated -Hungary had a Parliament like England - there was a lower house which was elected, and there was an upper house which, in England was the House of Lords (you had to be a Lord to be a member of the House of Lords) but in Hungary, just a prominent personalities were assigned to the upper house which was called, and so was he as a prominent personality in the Hungarian cultural and musical life. He was not interested in politics at all. At that time, the Anti-Semitic sentiment was growing, the Nazis were growing, the Hungarian lower house - the parliament - voted a law which said that as the Jewish population of Hungary was 11%, so the University shouldn't accept more than 11% Jewish students. That made obviously, the whole world, Hungary a laughing-stock, of the liberal world, which was, said, this is terrible - and probably it was. but if you think back about our times when we have, it was just affirmative action in reverse. The Jewish were more talented and more ambitious and , there were more Jews qualified for the UNIVERSITY THAN 11%, and that was by law forbidden. The net re sult that geniuses like Joan Cohen von Neuman Forneiman and Edward Teller, and Leo Sillard Szilard, instead of going to the University of Budapest went to Zurich or Berlin. But anyway, it was in one of the sessions of the Upper house, and he probably, half in sleep, voted for this law. Later on, the communists took power in Hungary, then Dohnanyi had to flee. He was declared a war criminal. Which was a little bit exaggerated. He went to South Africa; one of his prime students, Edy Kilenyi, who in the meantime became professor at the University of Florida in Tallahassee, and he brought Dohnanyi back to from South America where he was, and he ended his life by being in Tallahassee and writing his 3rd piano concerto which is still performed and that's the end. I didn't want to have my life story without, because I really, showed, I think, very limited admiration for my own master, Hubay, but I feel privileged and blessed for having known this great man and having played with him several times. So that is the story.

Going back, when we settled in America and we settled in Los Angeles because we had this contract with USC, and otherwise our life continued normally. We went touring in Australia, South Africa, South America, mostly to Europe. My two sons in the meantime grew up and went now to college, both of them, with 2 years difference, got full scholarship at Yale College. finishing the college years, they went to Yale Graduate Schools; my older son at Yale Law School, my younger son in the School of Economics; both of them made brilliant careers. So I was very blessed. As a result of this, instead of caring for children, my wife was free and we traveled together a tremendous amount. She didn't like to come to Australia or south America or something, but she loved to go to Europe. She became an amateur art historian. and she was very much interested in, especially Romanesque arts, and so when we

traveled, usually traveled by car, so my daily portion was to visit at least 10 churches, for which I begged for the privilege of having dinner in a 1 or 2 - restaurant in the evening. But we had a very nice time together from then on. We were married for 54 years when she unfortunately, in 1993, she died from lung cancer.

Anyway, our life went on in Los Angeles, with tours all the time. and then there came an invitation to spend the summer in Aspen. and tho, regularly in the summer we went to Europe and participated in the festival season in Edinburgh, and Salzburg, and Monteux ~~Monotone;~~ and all the festivals, and we were welcome. We thought, well, that might be interesting. Aspen, at that time, was not comparable to what it is now, a big factory - there was a core of original founding members of faculty and they had practically a self-government; decided about programs, who is playing what, and all that. There was obviously a Dean who directed the whole thing. But the members of the original faculty are basically was the Juilliard Quartet. when we were invited it was simply because the Juilliard Quartet, for some reason, in 1960, had ;something else to do and we sacrificed our festival season in Europe to have this experience. And for that I am really very grateful. The original faculty was a very homogeneous friendly group, excellent musicians like , well, the head of the piano people was the Queen, Rosina Levinne, who was much older than anyone else, but she was the wife of the legendary Josef Levinne who was at the beginning of the century, the greatest acclaimed virtuoso in piano; but she was a good pianist herself and she was a star teacher at Juilliard; among scores of others of Van Cliburn. and she was there. The violin faculty consisted of Eudice Shapiro, a wonderful violinist, Roman Totenberg. so we had a very pleasant summer there. The Dean of ...part of the contract was that we had to come to Boulder to play a concert and give a lecture in Boulder in the summer. so we came. At that time, Dean Imig, at the School of Music, came up to Aspen and asked if we would like to have a residence in Boulder. We said, we have contract with USC , by that time, was broken, so we didn't have any; and we wanted to have a residence to simply to reduce the number of concerts which was on average, 120 a year. So we said, let's see what can happen. We want to maintain our concert schedule, but we can spend maybe 6 weeks or more in Boulder. and then we ended up sometimes spending the whole semester. We didn't have any teaching duties, but we had to play concerts and we gave lots of lectures. We somehow got very much liked by the Boulder public and very popular and. Exactly what has happened 30 or 40 years later, when I succeeded to be helpful to bring the Takacs Quartet to Boulder. They are maybe even more popular here than we were; they are my godsons, they are still here, it is their residence; they are employed by the University, and they make concert tours.

Anyway, so In Aspen it was a great fun. There were students of course, but the teaching was very light. And everybody played concerts and the famous afternoon concerts in the hallowed tent of Aspen were always in the afternoon at 5 and punctually at 5:30 the thunderstorm came and the rain went out on the

top of the roof, so for 5 minutes nobody could hear anything; but we were used to that, and that was part of the fun. There was a tremendous social life with lots of partying and Zara Nelsova was the cello teacher; and Eddie Totens Edith Oppens was one of the pianists; Istomin was there that year; it was great fun. And when it ended, it was a very long season; it was Brooks Smith who accompanied everybody. There were so many concerts and so he was constantly having his white tuxedo on. On the final day, when he finished his last accompaniment, I remember him throwing ;his white tuxedo on the ground and stomping on it. Finally he doesn't have to wear it anymore.

We went back to Los Angeles where we lived for ~~9~~ 12 years, just to visit friends because basically we made up our mind that we might go to Boulder. But anyway, we drove to Los Angeles, which in our time, at least, the ~~>>>>~~ air ? of Beverly Hills was smog-free. You drove for miles and miles coming from the East and it was so terribly smoggy. So we went out to the beach at Santa Monica and went to a motel and walked on the beach with my wife, and whom do we meet on the beach , it was Rosina Levinne who for some reason, she lived in New York, but she came to Los Angeles, and seeing us, "Oh, that's great that I see you, I am giving a party next week, and you are coming. I invite my friends and everyone I know here." "That is fine, and why not?" It was a tremendous party and everybody - the film moguls and Gregor Piatagorsky, Henry Tamianka, and everybody who counted in music. It was a big gathering. And so we were there. The whole big reception hall was buzzing. Suddenly, the door opens and silence fell. In comes a very elegantly clad lady, followed by Jascha Heifetz, followed by his permanent accompanist who was Brooks Smith. It was like everybody was silent for a moment; it was the entrance of royalty. and that was a great moment. And my wife, who never saw Heifetz in ~~his~~ her life, peeped out loudly, here comes Brooksie, seeing Brooks Smith. ?????? Everyone laughing loud. Instead of recognizing Heifetz, she recognized Brooksie. That was a nice story.

From then on, we went on continued our life - had two changes in our string quartet, the late 50's, our original cellist, Vilmos Polatai, left for health reasons, and two years later, Moskovski left for personal reasons. so we had Gabriel Magyar as the cellist, and Michael Kuttnar as 2nd violinist. We had a new foundation, it was actually a renewed Hungarian Quartet. and we continued, and I think we were continuing and improving in our success. EMI, for whom we recorded a Beethoven cycle 10 years earlier, wanted to redo the whole thing with the new group, which we did. so we recorded the Beethoven cycle twice, with EMI, Parthe Marconi, which was the French affiliate of EMI. and again, we got the Grand Prix du Disc, which was the grand prize of Records in France, which was given to the best recording in any category, it happened to be in chamber music. so that was an achievement.

And then we went on, it was not much to report. We lived in Boulder, went to concert tours, and played in Boulder, and then after, in 1970, we decided for several reasons, especially the younger members of

the quartet, Kuttner, were figuring that Zoltan Skeley was getting 70, and how long it will take. when he was only 50 something, if he wants to do something with his life, and probably Zoltan will cease playing. There was no animosity or whatever, so we decided to disband. It was in 1970. I played with the Hungarian Quartet at that point for 35 years which is quite a long time, but I wasn't even 60 yet, so I thought why don't we continue. And so, I tried and succeeded to organize a new string quartet. At that time, when we were in Boulder, the head of the violin department was a first-rate, fabulous violinist, Andy Toth. We got very friendly. I thought, with him we could make a good string quartet and we succeeded with having two junior members - the cellist was his son, and the second violinist was Richard Young who was a long-time student of ours and a very good violinist. Toth had very good connections; he got us residency at Oberlin College which is a very fine college in the first place, but the Oberlin College Music School is one of the 10 best in the, or was at that time, probably still is, the best in the country. We obviously had teaching duties, but we had to ???? reduce because we were concertizing, and we called that the New Hungarian Quartet. And that was functioning for about 7 years when it broke up and . One of the reasons, several reasons, which I don't want to discuss here, but, at that time, the law was still on the books that you have to retire if you are a University professor, and I just got 65, so they had to terminate according to the law. They probably wouldn't have done it, but anyway, that is one of the reasons we decided to quit. And at that time, the new Dean of the College of Music, in Boulder, Dean Fink, sent out a letter probably to hundreds of viola teachers all around the country saying that there is a vacancy for the viola position at the university, whom would I recommend. As it turned out, I recommended myself. Because we had a house in Boulder - that is also a nice story because when we had our 25th wedding anniversary, it was I think in the early 50's, I asked my wife, now that is a great anniversary, now what could I give you? Would you like a nice fur coat or some nice jewelry. Oh, no, very modestly, buy me a house! So we bought a house in Boulder where we are still living for 23,000 dollars. Probably worth 300,000. so it was a very good choice.

so I was glad to come back to Boulder, because Boulder is one of the very much attractive places in the United States to live if you do not want to live in a big city, which I don't. and so I was graciously accepted as a viola teacher at the College; I taught viola and I taught chamber music; and we had a very pleasant life here. I was on the faculty here until I was 82, then I thought it was indecent to occupy somebody else's place at that high age, so I retired. Since 82 I am retired person. Unfortunately I lost my wife in 1993 for cancer. And that is, in a nutshell, my lifestory. I don't think I have anything else to add except a gratefulness for the very good friends I acquired on the faculty of the College of Music, friends who are supporting me, who are helping me, who are feeding me, and I am looking forward to end my life sometime when it is due. Over.